

OREGON PINOT — NOIR AND GRIS — SETTING THE PACE

by Rich Mauro

It's taken 40 years but Oregon has assumed a place among the world's great wine regions. High ratings of its wines are now commonplace. And, just as one example, *Fortune* magazine recently listed the Willamette Valley as a "new Napa" both for the quality of the wine and the growing tourist industry.

Today, Oregon is known worldwide for its Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris (in Oregon, it is against the law to label it as anything else). Although there are other good wines coming out of Oregon, particularly Chardonnay, Riesling and Pinot Blanc, it is these two that define the Oregon wine industry.

Burgundy is the benchmark for Pinot Noir and Alsace for Pinot Gris but Oregon's versions tend to emphasize fresher fruit aromas and livelier flavors, with higher alcohol.

The Oregon wine industry also has become a leader in the sustainable agriculture movement. This is seen in the increasing number of growers and wineries participating in four related certification programs.

LIVE (Low Input Viticulture and Enology, Inc.) certification promotes responsible stewardship of the land by recognizing practices that reduce reliance on synthetic chemicals and fertilizers and maintain biological diversity.

"Salmon Safe" certification recognizes practices that help restore and maintain healthy watersheds.

Organic certification from Oregon Tilth is awarded to those that meet biologically sound and socially equitable criteria. Many wineries also employ organic and sustainable farming practices without official recognition.

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building certification acknowledges achievement in sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality.

My recommendations from recent tastings are listed below. All carry a Willamette Valley designation unless otherwise indicated:

- Argyle. Australian Brian Croser partnered with Oregon vineyard owner Cal Knudsen to found Argyle in 1987. The winery has become one of Oregon's most consistent producers and also produces

top-notch sparkling wine. Each wine below is closed with a screw cap.

- Σ 2004 Pinot Noir Reserve
- Σ 2003 Pinot Noir Spirithouse
- Σ 2003 Pinot Noir Nuthouse

- Chehalem. Harry Peterson-Nedry left his high tech job in 1980 to pursue a dream of farming grapes and making wine. He named his winery after a local Native American word roughly translated as "valley of flowers". He has become one of the leaders in improving Oregon wine and is moving toward organic methods. Both wines are closed with screw caps.

- Σ 2004 Pinot Noir "3 Vineyard"
- Σ 2005 Pinot Gris

- King Estate. Founded in 1991 by the King family, King Estate has grown into one of Oregon's largest wineries and most popular wine tourist attractions. They also have been one of the pioneers of organic farming in the state. From the Signature Collection:

- Σ 2004 Pinot Noir Oregon
- Σ 2005 Pinot Gris Oregon
- Σ 2004 Pinot Gris "Vin Glace" Oregon (dessert wine)

- Montinore Estate. Established in 1982 in the foothills of the Coastal Range 30 miles west of Portland. Owner Rudy Marches bottles only estate grown fruit and is committed to sustainable and biodynamic farming.

- Σ 2002 Pinot Noir Graham's Block 7
- Σ 2005 Pinot Gris

- Ponzi Vineyards. Dick and Nancy Ponzi founded their winery in 1970 and have been leaders in growing the Oregon wine industry ever since, including the movement for responsible stewardship of the land. Truly a family winery, production now is being carried on by a second generation.

- Σ 2004 Pinot Noir
- Σ 2005 Pinot Gris (screw cap)
- Σ 2005 Pinot Blanc (screw cap)

- Rex Hill. Paul Hart and Jan Jacobsen founded Rex Hill in 1982 after Paul, a great fan of Burgundy, discovered the fine quality of Oregon wine. They named the winery after the steep slope that marks the entry to the Willamette Valley and now oversee one of the largest wineries in the state.

- Σ 2005 Pinot Noir Oregon
- Σ 2005 Pinot Gris Oregon

- RoxyAnn Winery. Founded in 2002 on a site that had been an orchard since

1897, this new winery and vineyard uses sustainable land management practices. Named after the nearby RoxyAnn peak, the property is located in Rogue Valley in southwestern Oregon in an area actually better for Bordeaux varietals. Hence, there is a Bordeaux blend and a couple of Merlots but (gasp!) no Pinot Noir.

- Σ 2005 Pinot Gris Oregon

- Sokol Blosser. Bill Blosser and Susan Sokol Blosser are another of the pioneers of Oregon wine, having planted their first vines in 1971. They also have been leaders in the sustainable agriculture movement utilizing a variety of stewardship practices.

- Σ 2003 Pinot Noir Dundee Hills

- Stoller Vineyards. The Stoller family has farmed this property since in 1943. Bill and Cathy Stoller became owners in 1993 and began the gradual conversion to vineyards. The new winery is LEED certified.

- Σ 2004 Pinot Noir Dundee Hills

- Van Duzer Vineyards. Former California vintners, Carl and Marilynn Thoma own and sustainably farm this 17 year-old property located at the mouth of the Van Duzer corridor, an east-west valley that funnels cooling Pacific breezes over the vineyards. They also have opened a new winery emphasizing energy efficiency.

- Σ 2004 Pinot Noir Estate
- Σ 2004 Pinot Noir Dijon Blocks
- Σ 2004 Pinot Noir Flagpole Block
- Σ 2005 Pinot Gris Estate

- WillaKenzie. Willakenzie is the name of the sedimentary soil found throughout this winery's vineyards. WillaKenzie Estate also is the fruition of Bernard Lacroute's decision to return to his French roots after a high-tech career and seek to make world class Burgundian-style wines. Founded in 1991 with his wife Ronni, the winery is committed to sustainability.

- Σ 2004 Pinot Noir
- Σ 2004 Pinot Gris Oregon
- Σ 2004 Pinot Blanc Oregon

- Willamette Valley Vineyards. Founded by Jim Bernau in 1983, Willamette Valley Vineyards has become one of Oregon's largest producers. Another winery that uses sustainable practices in growing and vinifying their grapes, they also are known for their moderate prices.

- Σ 2004 Pinot Noir Oregon
- Σ 2005 Pinot Gris Oregon